

out a processed sample from the unload lock chamber;
carrying in the sample into a vacuum processing
chamber, of the plural vacuum processing chambers, using the
load lock chamber;
processing said sample in said vacuum processing
chamber; and
carrying out said sample, processed in said vacuum
processing chamber, using said unload lock chamber,
wherein the opening and closing devices of the load
lock chamber are opened and closed every carrying-in of a
sample, to be processed, to the load lock chamber, and every
carrying-out of a processed sample from the unload lock
chamber.

REMARKS

Subsequent to issuance of the Notice of Allowance mailed December 7, 2000, in connection with the above-identified application, Applicants have amended their claims in order to further clarify the definition of the present invention. Specifically, each of claims 2, 15, 17, 19, 21 and 23 has been amended to recite that, in the lock (load and unload) chamber, one (semiconductor) wafer (or sample or substrate) is to be disposed. See, for example, pages 4-7, together with the second full paragraph on page 9 and the paragraph bridging pages 9 and 10, of Applicants' specification.

Moreover, claims 3, 9, 11, 13, 16, 25 and 26 have each been amended to recite that the lock chamber has opening and closing devices for carrying-in (semiconductor) wafers (or

samples or substrates), to be processed, into the lock chamber and for carrying-out (semiconductor) wafers (or samples or substrates), which have been processed, from the lock chamber; and claims 1, 3, 9, 11, 13, 16, 25 and 26 have been amended to recite that the opening and closing devices of the lock chamber are opened and closed every carrying-in of a wafer (or sample or substrate), to be processed, to the lock chamber, and every carrying-out of a processed wafer (or sample or substrate) from the lock chamber.

As seen from the foregoing portions of Applicants' specification referred to, the presently amended claims are clearly supported by Applicants' original disclosure, under the requirements of the first paragraph of 35 USC 112.

Applicants respectfully request entry of the present amendments, under 37 CFR 1.312, notwithstanding prior issuance of a Notice of Allowance in connection with the above-identified application. It is respectfully submitted that the present amendments are necessary such that the invention present be defined with sufficient clarity to form an adequate basis for an enforceable contract. In this regard, it is respectfully submitted that the present amendments are necessary in order to clarify the definition of the present invention, to further point out differences in connection with the present invention; and it is respectfully submitted that, particularly since the present amendments set forth further recitations in various of the independent claims of the above-identified application, will require no additional search or examination. It is respectfully submitted that the presently

amended claims, which contain additional recitations as compared to claims as allowed on December 7, 2000, are patentable for reasons by which the claims were previously allowed, and additionally in light of the features added by the present amendments, including wherein the lock chambers are opened and closed every carrying-in of a substrate, to be processed, to the lock chamber, and every carrying-out of a processed wafer from the lock chamber; and/or wherein the lock chambers are to have one wafer or sample disposed therein. Moreover, it is respectfully submitted that the present amendments are timely. In this regard, note that the claims of the above-identified application were allowed in a first Office Action on the merits in the above-identified application; accordingly, the present Amendment Under 37 CFR 1.312 constitutes Applicants' first opportunity to amend their claims, subsequent to a first Office Action on the merits in the above-identified application.

In view of the foregoing, it is respectfully submitted that Applicants have made the necessary showing under 37 CFR 1.312; and that, accordingly, entry of the present amendments is clearly proper.

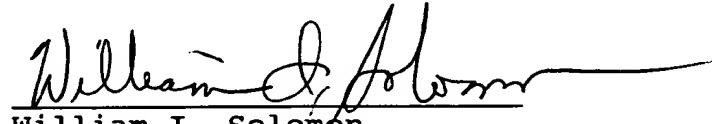
In view of all of the foregoing, entry of the present amendments, and, subsequently, issuance of a U.S. patent based on the above-identified application in due course, are respectfully requested.

To the extent necessary, Applicants petition for an extension of time under 37 CFR § 1.136. Please charge any shortage in fees due in connection with the filing of this

paper, including extension of time fees, to the Deposit Account No. 01-2135 (Case No. 503.30414C14) and please credit any excess fees to such Deposit Account.

Respectfully submitted,

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